

Our face looks drawn, hollow-cheeked and haggard, with our eyes puffy and bloodshot. Our skin turns ashen and loses its lustre. Our voice becomes hoarse and we cannot help but moan and groan. We have no control over our bowel movement and our breathing grows irregular. We lose our muscle tone, our flesh wastes away and we look emaciated and scrawny.

The suffering of sickness also includes mental illnesses such as depression, bi-polar disorder, etc.

2) *Pain and anguish increase and are seldom absent*

Physically we experience various types of pain, hurt and agony. Mentally we feel depressed, lonely and isolated. Day and night we are caught in the despair of disease, anxious that we may not recover, that we may lose our job and our friends, not be able to afford treatment, and so forth.

3) *There is no desire to enjoy pleasant objects*

During times of illness we lose our desire for the objects we enjoy when we are well; food, drinks, exercise, and companionship do not have any appeal anymore. They cause us to feel nauseous and aggravate our symptoms.

In case there are still objects that we do enjoy we are not able to indulge in them anymore, for they may worsen our condition. And even if certain activities that we usually like are not harmful we physically lack the strength to engage in them.

4) *One is forced to recourse to unpleasant objects, even though one does not want to*

When we are sick, not only are we unable to indulge in the objects we ordinarily enjoy, we have to do and undergo things we do not like. Our diet is restricted and we are only allowed to eat and drink things we find distasteful. We need to take medicine that has strong side effects and makes us feel worse. We undergo unpleasant treatments such as getting injections, having surgery and so forth.

5) *One loses one's vital energy, i.e. one dies*

When our disease is terminal and any kind of medical treatment proves unsuccessful we have to separate from our body, our loved ones, and our material possessions.

The **Extensive Sport Sutra** says:

*Hundreds of illnesses and the pain of rampant disease*

*Afflict us, just as humans oppress wild animals.*

*Regard the beings overwhelmed by old age and disease*

*And quickly speak about escape from suffering.*

*In deep winter, wind and great blizzards*

*Take the vigour from the grasses, shrubs, trees, and herbs.*

*In the same way, disease takes the vigour out of living beings;*

*It breaks down their faculties, physical appearance, and strength.*

*It will drain a great fortune in wealth and grain to the last.*

*Disease constantly humiliates living beings.*

*It harms them and is contemptuous of beauty.*

*It torments them, like the sun beating down from the sky.*

**The suffering of death**

Again there are five points to contemplate:

- 1) One is separated from objects of enjoyment that are nice and beloved
- 2) One is separated from close relatives that are nice and beloved
- 3) One is separated from companions that are nice and beloved
- 4) One is separated from a body that is nice and beloved
- 5) At the time of death one experiences terrible suffering and distress

1) *One is separated from objects of enjoyment that are nice and beloved*

At the time of death we have to leave behind all our possessions, all the objects we value and are attached to. We may have worked extremely hard to accumulate a lot of wealth, a good reputation, fame, renown, great knowledge, and so forth, but there is nothing we can take with us.

In a sutra it says:

*A king goes leaving behind his kingdom,*

*A beggar goes leaving behind his staff.*

Also Shantideva says in his ***Bodhisattvacharyavatara (Bodhisattva's Way of Life)***:

*Although I may have much material wealth,  
Be famous and well-spoken of,  
Whatever fame and renown I have amassed  
Has no power to accompany me (after death).*

- 2) *One is separated from close relatives that are nice and beloved*  
Even though we may have wonderful relatives, brothers and sisters, loving parents, a caring and understanding spouse, beautiful children, and so forth, at the time of death we have to separate from all of them.
- 3) *One is separated from companions that are nice and beloved*  
We may have numerous friends, companions, students, teachers, colleagues and other acquaintances whose company we enjoy, but when we die none of them can accompany us.
- 4) *One is separated from a body that is nice and beloved*  
From the time of our birth until the day we die we have this physical body; it is with us every moment of our life. We take care of it, worry about it, and nourish it. We dress it well, beautify, adorn it and make it strong. We try numerous ways to protect and guard it. However, at the time of death it deserts us and we have to leave it behind.
- 5) *At the time of death one experiences terrible suffering and distress*  
When we die we have to leave behind everything we know, everything that is near and dear to us. At the same time, we face an uncertain future, for we do not know where we will go and where we will be reborn. This uncertainty leads to terrible misery and fear.

The ***Extensive Sport Sutra*** says:

*You die and pass on to another life, and in so doing  
You are forever separated from people who are beautiful and beloved.  
Like a leaf fallen from a tree, or the current of a river,  
You will never return and meet them again,*

*Death makes the powerful weak.  
Death takes you away, as a river carries a log.  
People go alone, unaccompanied, with no companion –  
Powerless because their karma has its effect.*

*Death seizes myriad living beings,  
As sea-monsters seize swarms of creatures,  
As a garuda seizes a snake, or a lion an elephant,  
As fire takes hold of grass, trees, and swarming creatures.*

### **The suffering of encountering what is unpleasant**

Here there are also five points to contemplate:

- 1) Merely encountering one's enemy, one suffers and becomes unhappy
  - 2) One fears that one will be physically harmed by one's enemy
  - 3) One fears that one's enemy will spread malicious rumours about oneself
  - 4) One dreads death
  - 5) One fears that due to one's non-Dharmic activities, that one will be reborn in suffering existences
- 1) *Merely encountering one's enemy, one suffers and becomes unhappy*  
Here 'enemy' also refers to the people we dislike and do not want to be around. Wherever we are, whether at work or with friends and family, we feel unhappy and even miserable when we encounter those we dislike. Our peace of mind is immediately disturbed and hostility, anger and resentment arise.
  - 2) *One fears that one will be physically harmed by one's enemy*  
When there are people we dislike and do not get along with, we are fearful that they may harm us. We constantly have to be on our guard against their schemes and actions. They may possibly try to physically harm us, hurt our friends and family, and so forth.